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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

September 10, 1850.

DEAR SIR: I have just received yours of the 2d instant, in which you state that "some of the Democracy charge that I prefer a dissolution of the Union to the passage of the bills of adjustment" which have recently become laws.

Before the receipt of your letter, I addressed a communication to another constituent, a copy of which I send you, in which I have clearly "defined my position."

Finding that my opinions are misrepresented in other sections of the State, I have determined to print my letter of the 8th, and to circulate it among my constituents.

Very respectfully and truly,

E. C. CABELL.

Dr. G. D. FISHER, *Milton, West Florida.*

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Washington, September 8, 1850.

MY DEAR SIR: I hoped to pass through the canvass now going on in Florida without having an issue with Major BEARD, connected with the subject of slavery, but he has made one by avowing that he would "prefer a dissolution of the Union to the passage of the late Compromise Bill."

The contingency has happened in which he is "*for a dissolution of the Union.*" The Compromise Bill, *in form*, has not passed, but the various measures substantially embraced in the compromise *have passed in separate bills.*

I agree with Major Beard that the people have a right to know the opinion of the candidates for their suffrages on a question so important. I, therefore, address you this letter, and request you to let my opinions be known in your neighborhood. I shall send a copy of this to different parts of the State, and have no objection to your publishing it. Indeed, I prefer it, my object being to let the people fully understand my position.

Major Beard is for "*a dissolution of the Union,*" because of the passage of the Texas Boundary, California, and Territorial Bills, which together make up the "Omnibus" or "Compromise Bill. *I am not.* The issues are, Union or Disunion. *I am for the Union.* Peace or war, *I am for peace!*

I would have voted against "the Compromise Bill," and did not vote for some of the separate bills, and for none till I had endeavored to secure for the South every thing which has been claimed for her. But I am not *for going to war* because of their passage. I have said that the "Southern people ought to resist *hostile action* of the Government." But there has been no such action. We have not obtained all which I think should have been granted to us, but *no right has been taken away* by the action of Congress. There is nothing in the Territorial Bills excluding us from the country. I think it clear that New Mexico is open to us. The great mass of the population being this side of the Rio Grande, and *within the rightful jurisdiction of Texas*, this being in fact almost the only civilized part of the Territory, must give the law to the rest. It cannot be said that Mexican law is in force in this Territory. As to Utah, the bill forming a government for that Territory was so satisfactory to the South that it received the vote of every Southern Senator, and had only fifteen Southern Representatives against it, and near two-thirds voted for the Territorial Bill for New Mexico. In both bills the Wilmot proviso was expressly repudiated. A proposition to continue in force the Mexican laws against slavery was voted down; and for the first time since the formation of the Government the principle has been expressly recognised that the people of all the Territories of the United States have the right to form constitutions for their State Governments with or without slavery, as they may elect. This principle was refused in the Texas annexation resolutions. It was there declared that slavery should be excluded from *the States* to be formed out of territory north of 36 deg. 30 min. This restriction *has been repealed*, and all the country north and south of 36. deg. 30 min. is thrown open to the people to exclude or authorize slavery in their State Constitutions as they may choose. This was the question which shook the Union at the time of the Missouri controversy. The South has now achieved what it then failed to obtain.

You know how bitterly Mr. STEPHENS, of Georgia, was denounced for defeating Mr. Clayton's Compromise Bill, which simply left it to the Supreme Court to decide whether the Mexican laws excluding slavery remained in force in the acquired Territories. The whole Democratic party and a large portion of the Whig party of the South acquiesced in, and approved the principles of "Clayton's Bill." Surely no candid man will say that the provisions of the Utah and New Mexican Territorial Bills, which extend the Constitution of the United States over the Territories and repudiate the Wilmot proviso, are *less* favorable to the South than Clayton's Bill. We get *all* which that bill proposed to give us, and much more. The doctrine of *non-intervention* having been endorsed by nine-tenths of

the Southern people, and strenuously advocated by Mr. Calhoun. We cannot justify a dissolution of the Union *for these bills*, even if I am mistaken in the opinion that their provisions open the country to us.

The boundary of Texas was in dispute. I believe her claim was good to the Rio Grande, but a large majority of the people of the United States thought differently. It was an open question, and a proper subject for compromise. The peace of the country was dependent on its adjustment, yet I refused to vote for any settlement till I first saw that the Southern people were not to be excluded by Congress with their property from any portion of the disputed territory. Believing that this bill, as amended, left the whole country in dispute open to us, I voted for the settlement of the boundary. The bill is satisfactory to Texas, the party most interested, and will have the effect to save us from a civil war, which seemed almost inevitable. I do not think the passage of this bill will justify us in attempting to overthrow our Government.

The only other measure is the admission of California into the Union. This I regard as one of the greatest outrages ever perpetrated. But it is an outrage *upon all the States of the Union*, not solely on the South. I condemn, in the most decided manner, the circumstances attending her admission. But I doubt if the *practical* interests of the South would be promoted by remanding her to a Territorial Government. Ever since Mr. Polk sent a regiment of a thousand New Yorkers to California, to be disbanded there, the anti-slavery sentiment has been in the ascendant, and has been increased by accessions from the Northern States. If Congress had refused to admit California now, *the same people* would cure the outrageous irregularities attending their application for admission, and proceed regularly to work and frame a constitution excluding slavery. The only effect would have been to postpone the matter for six or twelve months. Besides, the general opinion is, that the lower part of California, certainly, is unfit for a slave population; at all events, it is clear that a sufficient number of slaves could not be carried to the country to influence a majority of the people, and it always has been, in my mind, a matter of questionable policy to divide the country, though I voted for a division in deference to the opinion of other Southern men. We should probably have two or more free States instead of one. But if it be true, as is stated by many, that slavery will be profitable in California, and the people there are not specially opposed to its introduction, they may, and I am sure, will amend their constitution, for slaves will always be carried where they can be profitably used.

The question of a dissolution of the Union is now in the hands of the people. They must determine whether the doubtful advantages attending

the defeat of the California bill will justify *forcible resistance* to the Government and consequent civil war. It is idle to talk about a *peaceable dissolution* of the Union. Civil war will inevitably ensue, and the stoutest heart must shudder at the bare contemplation of *such a war*. Yet I would not recommend my constituents to shrink from all its consequences if the Government had invaded or placed itself in hostility to any important constitutional right. I would not counsel my State to count the cost of maintaining its equality among the States of the Union. To be excluded from the common territory of the United States by Congress, would be a degradation to which our State would never submit, but I am sure, would “resist at all hazards and to the last extremity.” But the exclusion of slavery from California is the action of the *people there*, met to form their State Constitution—not of *Congress*. Congress has the power to admit new States into the Union. I think it has been very unwisely exercised in this case. But I recommend the people of Florida to consider what they are doing, before they attempt to make war upon their Government because the *people of California* have thought proper to have an anti-slavery clause in their constitution.

Now, let me suppose, my dear sir, that, for divers causes, you are in favor of a dissolution of the Union, is this the time or the issue on which to dissolve?

In the first place, to effect this object, the people of the Southern States must be *united*. For my own part, I doubt if we ever shall have union among ourselves. I have heretofore tried all in my power to bring it about, but certain and leading politicians of my State, professing to believe that “*a crisis*” was *at hand*, have shown that they are ready to distract and divide our country, to secure a pitiful party triumph, and such I fear, will be the case in other States.

But supposing the *people of Florida* united in their purpose to dissolve the Union—with the exception of the State of South Carolina, they would *stand alone*. There will be considerable effervescence in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi; but to say the least, the people of those States are so nearly equally divided, that the efforts of the disunionists will be paralyzed. You can’t get the Southern people to resist the action of their Government on account of measures which have been carried by *the votes of Southern men*. The records show that nearly two-thirds of the Southern delegation voted for the Territorial bills and for the adjustment of the boundary of Texas; and even for the admission of California there was very near one-third of the Southern vote.

You may believe that a dissolution of the Union is, *per se*, a desirable thing for the South. I will not argue this point, and I am not prepared to



say that it would not be to the interest of the Southern States to form a separate confederacy, if they first make *preparations* to maintain their independence, and could *all* get out of the Union *peaceably*, and *stay out peaceably*, which is impossible. But in what condition would *Florida* and *South Carolina* be, if we go to work *now* to dissolve? As I have stated in my printed circular, we are almost entirely dependent on the North. We manufacture almost nothing—we have not a ship—no organization of any sort. The thing is ridiculous. If you want to sever your connection with the Northern States, of whose conduct we have so much cause to complain, urge your neighbors and all the people to set about making themselves *independent*. This they should do without reference to a dissolution of the Union. I hope that not only my State, but all the Southern States will adopt the suggestions of my circular.

This letter is already too long. I have said enough to let you see that I differ from Major Beard as to the propriety of dissolving the Union. If I were in favor of a dissolution of the Union now, I would not think of being a candidate for the Federal Congress, to which, if elected, I should have to take an oath to support the Constitution of a Government I was exerting myself to overthrow. I would spurn connexion with a Government I wanted to destroy, and would proceed to rally the people of my State and the South to form a separate and independent Republic.

Major Beard has gone further even than the hot-headed South Carolinian, (Mr. Rhett,) who has avowed himself in favor of "*temporary secession*."

Mr. Rhett would *get back*, after a while, *if he can*; but Major Beard would *go out*, never to return. This gentleman is a conscientious man, and would not trifle on so grave a subject. I am sure he is in earnest, and is influenced by ardent attachment to the South. I respect his opinions, but think that in this case his zeal for Southern rights has run ahead of his discretion. I think he misunderstands the sentiments and wishes of the people of Florida, and their true interests. But we shall soon see. *Those who vote for him vote to dissolve the Union* for measures which, all together, I believe satisfactory to a large majority of the Southern people, and which are more favorable than I ever expected to get for the South. I have already expressed my opposition to California, and have given my opinion of the other bills. So far from believing them cause for dissolution, I think that, as to the Territories, the South has achieved a great triumph. I and four other Southern Whigs were denounced all over the Union as agitators, factionists, and disunionists, because we asked our party to adopt a resolution simply declaring that "Congress ought not to pass a law prohibiting slavery in the Territories." *Congress has now come on our platform*. At the beginning of the session there was a majority of 20

for the application of the "Wilmot proviso" to the Territories; now, Mr. Wilmot's "occupation is gone." The proviso was scouted out of the House of Representatives; agitation is at an end, and fanaticism rebuked. This great good has resulted from a course which so many of my political friends condemned. They must now see its policy and propriety.

I observe Major Beard is severe on the Administration for ordering the troops out of Florida to "whip Texas," as he says. Now it is not true, as has been reported, that the troops, or any part of them, except those who left some time ago, have been ordered out of the State; and the anxiety which Mr. Fillmore has evinced for a fair adjustment of our difficulties shows that he was far from desiring a conflict with the Texan people. There are doctrines in the President's Message against which I solemnly protest, but the message shows an ardent wish for an *equitable settlement* of all the slavery questions, and I can honestly say that *no Northern man* is, or has been, more anxious to do full justice to the South than Mr. Fillmore. He is, on this account, at open war with Seward and his abolition clique.

But if Major Beard is in earnest in recommending a dissolution of the Union, and a consequent war with the Federal Government, it seems to me he ought to desire to get the Federal troops out of the country as soon as possible. It is as much as our people can do to defend themselves against the Indians; their situation would be deplorable if they had to fight the troops of the United States besides. Before we dissolve, common prudence would dictate to us to get all the Government soldiers out of the State; and should Major B. be elected, the first thing he should do, *with his views*, would be to have every soldier withdrawn; and when he comes to take his seat in Congress, he cannot, with any grace, or expectation of success, ask legislation for his constituents from a Government which he has pledged himself to endeavor to overturn; certainly, he cannot ask to have *more Federal troops* sent to Florida.

I must conclude this long letter. I express no opinion of the propriety of the one-sided canvass which is going on in my absence in the public service. This is a mere matter of taste. I know my interest would be advanced by my presence among my constituents, but I cannot reconcile it to my sense of duty to absent myself from Congress.

Having disposed of the slave questions, I hope that some time will now be given to the real interests of the country. I shall remain here, and endeavor to procure the payment of our volunteers for their services at various times, and the passage of the soldier bounty land bill, the swamp and railroad bills, and others in which my constituents are interested. I shall rely on you and other friends to represent me in my absence. I have

no doubt of my election, and shall be disappointed if I do not get a larger majority than ever before. You will hear of disaffection of my friends in *far-off* places. This is a trick of politicians. You recollect they said to the people of Middle and West Florida that Gov. Duval would "sweep the East," and alarmed my Eastern friends by the destruction the worthy Governor would make in the Whig ranks in the Middle and West. But you know the result. Here and there may possibly be a disappointed office seeker who will feign some pretext for voting against me, but his motives will be too apparent to give his opposition any influence. I will venture my election that there are not five men in the State, who formerly supported me, who will go against me now, except those who are dissatisfied with some appointment made, or supposed to be made, through my influence. This is the natural consequence of my connexion with the administration. I believe there are very few such among my supporters. I know there are none who have just cause of complaint.

Congress will probably adjourn the last day of the month—too late for me to canvass any part of the State. I shall try to get home to the election.

Yours, very truly,

E. C. CABELL.

P. S. September 9th. The Bill, fixing the Boundary of Texas, and erecting a Territorial Government for New Mexico, as amended by the House of Representatives, has just passed the Senate, with only one *Southern vote*, *Thomas H. Benton*, against it. Shall we dissolve the Union on account of a law which every Southern Senator voted for or acquiesced in except THOMAS HART BENTON?









